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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of using predictable stories as reading materials on the oral and emergent literacy development of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) beginners. A child-centered, literature-based curriculum integrating whole language philosophy was developed for a group of kindergarten students at a public high school in Taipei, Taiwan. Daily instruction was given by the researcher for one school year. Five students ages 6 to 7 were chosen on the basis of family background and ability level. The study examined children's oral performance and emergent literacy development. Data came from observation during daily instruction and parent interviews. Data collection involved videotapes, audiotapes, teaching logs, student portfolios, and miscue analysis. Results showed that predictable storybooks enabled ESL children to develop some aspects of reading behaviors such as book awareness, direction of print, and print awareness. Parents' attitudes toward emergent literacy correlated with children's second language reading behaviors. The story instruction was useful in expanding children's oral language use in real-life situations. An appendix presents the Emergent Reading Behavior Inventory. (Contains 19 references.) (SM)

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Starting with Predictable Stories:

EFL Children's Oral and Literacy Development

ED 462 846

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This study investigated the effect of using predictable stories as reading materials on the oral and emergent literacy development of EFL beginners in a kindergarten setting. A child-centered and literature-based curriculum integrating whole language philosophy was developed for a group of kindergarten students at a typical public school in Taipei. Daily instruction was given by the researcher for one school year. Five students aged 6 to 7 were chosen based on a consideration of their family background and ability levels. Using the mode of ethnographic research, the study involved multiple data sources obtained from observation during daily instruction and parental interviews in order to examine children's oral performance and emergent literacy development. Data collection was obtained by the use of videotape, audiotape, teaching logs, students' portfolios, and miscue analysis. The findings of the study showed that predictable storybooks enable EFL children to develop some aspects of reading behaviors such as book awareness, the direction of print and print awareness. The parents' attitudes toward emergent literacy observed in the study are correlated with the children's L2 reading behaviors. The story instruction provides a great source to expand the children's oral language use in the real-life situation. The findings provide EFL teachers and curriculum planners with new information about how EFL children develop their second language reading and how they expand their overall L2 proficiency when immersing in predictable stories at the beginning level.

INTRODUCTION

Elementary school English instruction has become a popular field of research in English teaching in recent years. Most studies seem to suggest that developing listening and speaking skills should be the main goal of elementary school English instruction; reading and writing, the more cognitive demanding, should be held back until students have mastered basic aural and oral proficiency (Dai, 1998). Moreover, most people including parents, administrators, and teachers have a bias toward beginning reading instruction for EFL children (Su, 1999). They think learning to read a second language at the beginning level is learning to look up the

meanings of all new words in texts, translate word by word with the help of grammatical rules, recite the vocabulary, and finally evaluate what is learned with paper-pencil tests.

However, innovative second language teaching using whole language philosophy has a totally different view toward reading. Whole language advocators argue that bilingual children learn to read and write a second language even with limited oral proficiency (Goodman, Goodman and Flores1979; Hudelson, 1981). Similar to monolingual children's literacy development, bilingual children are read interesting stories from the beginning stage in a meaningful and purposeful context. They see a lot of posters, ads, and signs to understand print represents meaning. At the emergent literacy level, they memorize their favorite stories and pretend they are able to read the whole text. Gradually, they develop print awareness and phonemic awareness to confirm the link they have made between spoken language and written language. Many research studies postulate that the stage of "emergent reading" is necessary for children at the beginning level in both L1 and L2 (Cutting, 1989; Holdaway, 1979; Ollila and Mayfield, 1992). Moreover, reading can serve as an important source of language input and contribute to the development of overall proficiency (Krashen, 1983).

In view of children's reading development, a print-rich environment helps children to develop emergent literacy. This is crucial especially for children whose first language writing system is totally different from that of the target language as they need more time to overcome the difficulties of learning another writing system. Thus to speed up the learning process, our young learners must develop an awareness of the differences between Chinese, a graphic (character) writing system and English, an alphabetical script at the early stage of their learning.

Additionally, reading strategies such as sampling and prediction should be taught along with phonics instruction. Most traditional ESL beginning reading materials are routinely written to present grammatical structures and vocabulary consistent with phonics rules for practicing basic reading skills. Furthermore, the purpose of most current phonics instruction is to enable a reader to sound out a written form of a word that the reader already knows in its spoken form. The assumption is that once a native speaker of English knows how a written word is pronounced, s/he will associate it with the spoken word and understand it. This is not the case with EFL children because they do not have access to the meaning of a word if it has not been previously learned even though they can sound it out correctly.

Moreover, this simplification of beginning readers, which are typically written for practicing the structures and vocabulary consistent with phonics rules, makes reading meaningless and less effective. Smith (1985) argued that reading is not a simple matter of sound decoding. Reading strategies not only consist of graph-phonemic decoding but also skimming, guessing and prediction by using readers' syntactic and semantic knowledge. Because prediction has been generally ignored in the traditional EFL reading materials and

instruction, children's predictive intuition should be enhanced in order to promote their reading ability (Smith, 1975).

Goodman (1986) also pointed out that the best reading materials for beginning level are predictable stories. Folk tales such as "Goldilocks and Three Bears" and "The Three Little Pigs" are typical examples. These stories contain cyclical sequencing and repeating phrases that make children predict and read easily. Young children love rereading predictable stories and pride themselves in their ability to predict and retell the stories, which gives them meaningful and self-motivated practices. The use of predictable stories has been cited by many researchers as an excellent source for supporting children's language development in both L1 and L2 classrooms (Bassenett & Grundy, 1993; Froese, 1991; Freeman & Freeman, 1992; River, 1987; Weaver, 1990). Searcella and Oxford (1992) also suggested that beginning learners need exposure to real language, especially the authentic texts that are written in relatively simple style and contain predictable structures and content. Students can read and understand predictable stories that are repetitious in nature. This repetitive device enables young children to participate: even many unfamiliar words and sentence structures become easy for them.

Needless to say, the success of reading instruction for young EFL learners depends to a large extent on selecting the appropriate materials. Predictable stories provide an innovation on literacy instruction for EFL children in that the repetitious structures and the element of fun in the story invariably make reading easy and intrinsically motivating for the very young learners. However, in spite of the impressive results of using predictable books in L2 learning, many predictable stories with interesting plots are not introduced to learners until they are at an intermediate or advanced level in most EFL reading classes. Most EFL curriculum planners carefully select reading texts and listening input given to students based on a structure-oriented arrangement. And then unfortunately most authentic stories starting with "Once upon a time" or with complex tenses and voices are withheld until appropriate grammar rules are taught. As a result, few studies have been undertaken on using predictable stories for EFL beginners in Taiwan. This study seeks to complement the research done in the application of predictable materials on second language children in a whole language classroom setting. In particular, it examined the efficacy of reading instruction and how it affects young learners' progress in speaking and literacy development.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of oral and emergent literacy development when using predictable stories as reading materials on EFL beginners in kindergarten. Specifically, this descriptive study attempted to investigate the following questions:

I. What changes occur in EFL children's oral language use after reading a variety of predictable reading materials?

II. How do predictable reading texts influence EFL children's emergent reading behaviors before formal reading instruction? Specifically,

   1. Can reading predictable stories help EFL students to develop print awareness before formal reading instruction?
   2. Can reading predictable stories help EFL students to employ their limited grapho-phonics knowledge without explicit phonics instructions?

III. What are the relationships between parents' involvement and children's development of second language reading?

METHOD

A child-centered and literature-based curriculum integrating whole language philosophy, the natural approach and TPR was developed for a group of kindergarten students aged 4 to 7. The researcher taught the kindergarten class for two semesters, fifty minutes per day, five times a week in a typical public school in Taipei County. For the purpose of this study, five students aged 5 and 6 were chosen based on the variety of their family background and ability levels (See Table 1).

Using the mode of ethnographic research, this study involved multiple data sources obtained from observation during daily instruction and personal interviews with the subjects and their parents before and after the program. Data collection was conducted by the use of videotape, audiotape, teaching logs, students' portfolios, and miscue analysis. Classroom observation focuses on children's oral performance and emergent literacy development.

Table 1

Background Information of Subjects

Name / Variable	Nicole	Wendy	Sharol	Steve	Oscar
Gender	F	F	F	M	M
Age	5	6	5	5	5
Previous English learning experience	Mother's tutoring	None	None	6 months in cram school at the age of 3	None
Parents' aural and oral proficiency in English	Father: fair Mother: fair	Father: fair	Father: fair Mother: fair	Father: fair Mother: fair	Father: fair Mother: fair
Parents' reading ability in English	Father: good Mother:good	Father: fair	Father: good Mother:good	Father: fair Mother: fair	Father: fair Mother: fair

Instrument

To address the research questions, this study employed three instruments briefly described as follows:

1. *Literature Reading Behavior Inventory*. This inventory, adapted from Goodman and Altwerger's *Book Handling Knowledge Task* (1981), was used at the midterm and final of each semester in order to observe each student's change in reading behaviors (Appendix A). The scoring of each individual child's reading behaviors was done by giving one to four points for each item in the inventory in order to examine students' reading process development

2. *Miscue Analysis*. This instrument, adapted from Goodman, Waston, and Burke's *Miscue Analysis Inventory Procedure III* (1987), was employed to measure each child's reading proficiency in the final evaluation which was held at the end of the second semester. This inventory has been widely used to evaluate a reader's consecutive miscues through a series of questions designed to obtain the myriad of information about the causes of miscues and their influences on the reader's comprehension. The analysis which decodes the children's oral reading errors provides an in-depth look of their reading strategy employment such as syntactic knowledge, semantic knowledge, and grpah-phonics knowledge.

3. *Parents Interview*. A list of questions was developed to obtain information concerning parents' perception of their children's English language learning and of their own literacy development. Parents were asked to fill out all questions the best they can. Additionally, personal interviews with the parents were conducted to supplement the information obtained from the question sheet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data were obtained from observing the children's emergent literacy and oral developmental process after immersing them in a variety of reading activities using predictable storybooks. The children's learning behaviors and performances were carefully documented and organized for analysis. The results are discussed in the following based on the research questions.

Question1. What changes occur in children's oral language use through reading a variety of predictable reading materials?

The data responding to this question were collected by videotaping and tape-recording during the instruction of predictable reading materials. Field notes and anecdotal records collected from daily observation were also used to show children's oral language use in a specific situation. The following speech samples are presented chronologically to show students' progress in oral language use.

Nov 16~20

The teacher read Goldilocks and the Three Bears *to students and elicited their comments on Goldilocks. One day, the teacher stayed and had a snack with the children after English class. They had hot oyster noodles that morning. The researcher inquired the children about their food.*

Researcher: How is it? Do you like it?

Nicole: Oh! This "O-a-mi-sua" (oyster noodles) is too hot!

Researcher: Oh! Really? My "O-a-mi-sua" (oyster noodles) is hot, too!

Wendy: No! No! No! Just right.

Jan 5~8.

The Farmer and the Beet was read aloud and each child took the role of one of the animals in the story in turns at the end of story instruction.

Researcher: Oh! I can't open the door. Who can help me?

Sharol: I can help you. (Tries to open the door.) Oh! No!

Researcher: Can you get someone to help?

Sharol: Please help me...open the door.

Nicole: Sure, I'll help.

April 20~30.

The Three Little Pigs was read in the middle of the second semester. All of the children loved to play the roles of little pigs, especially the part, "door answering". Weeks later, the children could still clearly remember the lines in the story — "Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin." Moreover, they adroitly applied it in the following context:

Teacher: I am a mail carrier and I deliver mail to people. Oh! This is Steve's mail. Knock, knock, knock, anybody home?

Steve: He is not here.

Teacher: I know you're Steve. There's a letter for you. Let me in.

Steve: Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin.

Teacher: I'm not the big bad wolf. I am the mail carrier. There's a letter for you. Please let me in.

All kids: No, no, no! Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin. You're the big bad wolf.

In this episode, repeated patterns in the predictable stories work like magic. They can easily trigger oral production in young children.

June 10~17.

The Gingerbread Man was the last "once-upon-a-time story" in the curriculum. After the story was read aloud, the children were familiar with the repetitious pattern in this story — "Run, run, run as fast as you can. You can't catch me. I am the Gingerbread Man.". The lines were often heard when the children were on their way to the toilets or playing tag.

The above data from field notes and the transcription of videotapes reveal that the patterns in predictable stories are easily committed to children's memory and become parts of children's language repertoire. Furthermore, the patterns and vocabulary are presented in a meaningful context, and this simulation enables the children to transfer what they learned in the classroom to real-life situations. This should be the ultimate goal of instruction in any class.

Question 2A. Can reading predictable stories help students to develop print awareness before formal reading instruction?

The reading behaviors and strategies used by children were checked based on the *Emergent Reading Behavior Inventory*. The researcher identified the children's reading behaviors and strategies by observing what they did in the actual reading process during the week of story instruction. The subject's reading performance was marked at the middle and the end of each semester. The categories for reading behaviors analysis were book awareness, directionality, print awareness, reading-like behavior, and use of cueing systems. Totally, there were four evaluations throughout the school year, and four scores were obtained from these evaluations. Table 2 presents the scores obtained based on the checklist of the *Emergent Reading Behavior Inventory*.

Table 2

Emergent Reading Behavior Inventory Scores

Student's Name	1st Evaluation	2nd Evaluation	3rd Evaluation	4th Evaluation
Nicole	62	71	90	88
Wendy	53	70	89	89
Sharol	52	63	69	71
Steve	45	54	69	80
Oscar	49	58	65	63

Note: The four evaluations were held in November 1998, and in January, April, June of 1999.

The data shows that students made obvious progress in concepts about print, e.g., book awareness, print direction, and print awareness. Contrary to the belief held by teachers of traditional reading instruction, the results prove that young children construct print awareness through literacy activities before formal reading instruction. Through reading predictable storybooks, young children show reading-like behaviors, and developed the concepts about print at the emergent literacy level.

Question 2B. Can reading predictable storybooks enable students to employ their limited grapho-phonics knowledge without explicit phonics instructions?

At the end of the study, *Miscue Analysis* was employed to identify the children's reading strategies in the final evaluation. The children's reading behaviors and reading strategies

were observed when they read the story, *The Farmer and the Beet*, in the final evaluation. Except for Oscar, the other children confidently read the whole story even though they sometimes stopped in one or two sentences, and then continued their reading by employing their syntactic, semantic, and grapho-phonemic knowledge to make sense of the text or by the teacher's clues or direct assistance. Some of the children might have read by resorting to memory and pictorial clues, but some of the children showed that they were making use of other reading strategies when reading the story. The following is an example by Wendy[1]:

Thank you, mouse!" C **so**[2] the farmer.
1105 Thank you, mouse!" said the farmer.

An analysis of Wendy's miscues reveals that she used reading strategies involving graphic identification and the sound-letter relationship in the process of her reading. For example, after reading "Thank you, mouse!" so the ...." in Line 1105, she moved her finger back to the word "said" and immediately read, "said the farmer." Moreover, she attempted to identify the beginning letter and read by using her grapho-phonics knowledge when she had trouble in reading some unknown words. Wendy represents a typical case in which a child is able to use grapho-phonics knowledge to explore the world of print, even through she has not had any formal reading instruction in letters, phonics, spelling, and so on.

Question 3. What is the relationship between parents' involvement and children's development of second language reading?

The data obtained form the parents provided information about children's family literacy Environment (Table 3), which is an important factor in children's literacy development. Parental effort plays a significant role in the children's language development at the beginning stage, so does the parents' attitude toward written language which often has a great impact on children's reading habits and behaviors. Through written and oral communication, the questions asked includes parents' previous learning experiences and their perception of their children's language learning in both L1 and L2. In addition, the study also inquired about parents' concepts regarding literacy learning for preschoolers and their support of family literacy. Table 3 is a summary of data in each category. The data shows that parents' concepts about children's literacy development strongly influenced what they did to support their children's literacy learning and how they offered literacy activities to assist the young always gave positive feedback when Wendy showed strong motivation in extracting meaning

[1] In *Miscue Analysis* transcript, the first line represents the reader's oral reading, and the second line represents the original text. The boldface represents the reader's oral reading errors.

[2] C indicates that the reader self-corrects his/her oral reading error.

Table 3

Parents' Perceptions of Language Learning

Item	Category / Question	Nicole's mother	Wendy's father	Sharol's mother	Steve's mother	Oscar's mother
I	Concepts of L2 Learning					
1	Parents' self-learning experience after graduating from school	Listen to ICRT & reading magazines	Listen to audio-tape and talk in English	In-service training (McDonald)	Listen to ICRT & reading magazines.	Watch Videos
7	Parents' reflection of English learning experience	To learn reading and writing skills	To learn grammar and study for exams	To learn reading and writing	To learn reading and writing skills	To learn reading and writing skills
2	Definition of English learning	To learn aural and oral skills	Aural and oral skills first	To learn aural and oral skills	To learn aural and oral skills	For real-life application
3	Expectation of school English instruction	To learn aural and oral skills	Aural and oral skills first	To learn aural and oral skills	To learn aural and oral skills	Aural and oral skills first
4& 7	Perception of child's school learning & Parents' support	Good & Q and A	Good & Little	Good & Asking aunt	Good & CD-ROM	Fair & Audio-tape
10	Perception of child's literacy	Child are able to read books	Child's question about words	Child are able to read books	Child are able to read books	Child are able to read books
II	Concept of L1 learning					
5	Parents' reflection of Chinese learning experience	Literate after school age	Literate after school age	Literate before school age (sibling)	Literate after school age	Literate after school age
6	Perception of child's literacy in Chinese (Level & how)	word recognition and sound out phonetic symbols	Some & word recognition	Little & sound out phonetic symbols	Little & sound out phonetic symbols	Little & sound out phonetic symbols
III	Family Literacy Support					
8A	Number of English books at home	Some(picture dictionary, encyclopedia, and story)	None	None	Some (story)	Some (picture dictionary)
8B	Desire to buy books	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
9-1	Reading habits at home	Often, literacy learning in the context	Sometimes, bedtime story	Often, listen to stories	Sometimes, listen to stories	Often Word identify
9-2	Reading behaviors at home	finger-point & prediction	finger-point, prediction, & confirmation	Stop for help	Stop for help	skip unknown word

learners. Among the parents participated in this study, Nicole's mother appears to be the most supportive in that she often read stories and engaged her children in a variety of literacy activities. According to her, ever since Nicole learned how to talk, she would ask her to identify environmental print such as signs or logos on the street. She also share-read different kinds of books such as English picture dictionaries, stories, or news. She firmly believes that literacy learning should be meaningful to children. Another example is Wendy's father. He from environmental print such as newspaper or TV ads. The other parents primarily asked their children to read a book accompanied by an audio-tape or corrected their children's oral reading mistakes.

In general, children whose parents value the importance of literacy learning have positive attitudes toward children's emergent literacy and encourage their children's reading-like behaviors. However, it does not necessarily follow that parental supports in literacy activities would lead to desirable literacy performance. For example, Oscar's mother showed sincere concerns on word recognition, and Oscar did not have a strong motivation in reading unfamiliar materials. Wendy's motivation and interests in literacy learning did not result from her family literacy activities; however, her father's positive attitudes toward emergent literacy learning encouraged her reading-like behaviors and her willingness to take risk when reading unfamiliar materials.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study reveal that EFL children can establish reading readiness and construct meaning through reading predictable materials even if they have limited English proficiency, and they can also expand the sources of input to increase overall English proficiency. With exposure to written language meaningfully and purposefully, most of the children adapted the gross aspects of reading behaviors such as book concepts, direction concepts and print awareness, and some of the children even began to employ their limited grapho-phonics knowledge in exploring word recognition. In this study, parents' attitudes toward literacy learning and involvement in home literacy activities are factors contributing to young learners' motivation in their emergent literacy learning. Predictable stories provided another source to motivate self-directed learning after class.

The findings of this pilot study are significant in that it shows the early introduction to reading speeds children's progress in literacy learning and in understanding and speaking the target language. It suggests that EFL teachers judiciously adopt appropriate reading materials for young beginners and explore whole language philosophy to better assist children's reading development. Above all, these findings provide new insights into second language reading instruction for teachers who are seeking alternatives to the structure-based curriculum and those who believe that EFL instruction should be a strictly linear process of

teaching skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing sequentially.

Limitations

As with qualitative studies of similar nature, this case study included only five subjects for detailed data analysis. Thus, the results may not be generalized over a greater population. Second, due to the instruction policy of public kindergarten, writing is not included in the preschoolers' curriculum and teachers are discouraged from teaching writing. Thus instead of encouraging students to write from the very beginning based on whole language philosophy, the teacher wrote down students' description along their illustration. Further research should be conducted to investigate the correlation between children's emergent literacy behaviors and their reading abilities when they are in the independent reading stage.

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APPENDIX A. Emergent Reading Behavior Inventory

(Adapted from Goodman & Altwerger, 1981) Total Points: ___ / 100

Item	Scoring Standard	Never	Some-times	Often	Always
I.	BOOK AWARENESS				
1.	The child listens to stories for short periods of time.				
2.	The child talks about story when asked to share a reading experience.				
3.	The child begins looking at books as a self-initiated activity.				
4.	The child holds the book right side up.				
5.	The child turns pages in sequence from left to right, front to back.				
6.	The child enjoys having stories read to him or her.				
II.	DIRECTIONALITY				
1.	The child recognizes story begins on the top left line on the first page.				
2.	The child shows finger movement from left to right at any line.				
3.	The child shows return sweep (from top left to right bottom).				
4.	The child recognizes the first part the last word of a page.				
III.	PRINT ,WORD AND LETTER AWARENESS				
1.	The child shows accurate word-match of spoken word and written word.				
2.	The child recognizes common words in stories.				
3.	The child identifies one word in the story.				
4.	The child identifies one letter in a word.				
5.	The child identifies a capital letter in a story.				
III.	READING-LIKE BEHAVIOR				
1.	The child attempts to read the selection (oral responses reflect).				
2.	The child attempts to read using pictures as the cue to story line (attends to pictures)				
3.	The child attempts to read by retelling a remembered text (attends to memory and pictures)				
4.	The child holistic remembering – uses memory, picture and text to recall the story line.				
5.	The child begins to self-correct for meaning.				
V.	USES OF CUEING SYSTEMS				
1.	The child uses tracking, syntax and semantic systems well.				
2.	The child becomes aware of letters and sound relationship (attempt to graph-phonemic cues).				
3.	The child recognizes letter names in familiar words.				
4.	The child talks about his or her own reading behaviors – ("That's 'dog'. I know because it begins like my name, "David.").				
5.	The child uses a variety of cueing systems (picture cues, memory, syntax, semantic, and graph-phonemic cues) to read new materials.				

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